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1 – Cleanup Continues At Deer Park Facility, Crews Laying Foam On Exposed Chemicals To Prevent Emissions, Houston Public Media, 3/25/19

<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/2019/03/25/326461/cleanup-continues-at-deer-park-facility-no-dangerous-chemicals-detected-in-last-24-hours/>

The cleanup process continues at the Deer Park petrochemical storage facility that sustained a massive fire last week. Officials said Monday the latest air quality readings are satisfactory and water is being tested, while traffic on part of the Houston Ship Channel is still restricted.

2 - Deer Park's mayor says progress is being made after the chemical fire. But some residents aren't so sure, CNN, 3/25/19

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/25/us/deer-park-residents-environment/index.html>

The Houston Ship Channel remained closed Monday because of oil and pollutants that leaked into the waterway during last week's chemical fire at the Intercontinental Terminals Company in Deer Park, Texas, a Coast Guard official told reporters.

3 - Environmental, Economic Damage a Concern Now That Houston-Area Fire Out, NBC, 3/25/19

<https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/Environmental-Economic-Damage-a-Concern-Now-That-Houston-Area-Fire-Out-507652641.html>

Businesses and residents expressed concern Monday about the environment and economic fallout from a fire at a Houston-area petrochemical storage farm that sent huge plumes into the air for days and prompted the partial closure of one of the busiest commercial waterways in the U.S.

4 - Houston Ship Channel closure could cost \$1 billion, Houston Chronicle, 3/25/19

<https://www.chron.com/business/energy/article/Houston-Ship-Channel-closure-could-cost-1-billion-13715272.php>

The closure of a portion of the Houston Ship Channel in the aftermath of the days-long Deer Park chemical fire could cost the petroleum and petrochemical sectors an estimated \$1 billion in direct and indirect costs and lost revenues, experts said.

5 - Deer Park fire underscores why good companies plan for disasters, Houston Chronicle, 3/25/19

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/energy/article/Deer-Park-fire-underscores-why-good-companies-13714014.php>

As a cloud of toxic darkness hovered above, spokeswoman Alice Richardson was asked if the Intercontinental Terminals Co. would apologize to all of the residents of Deer Park for the petrochemical fire that raged for almost four days, releasing a seemingly endless plume of noxious smoke that would stretch hundreds of miles in the sky.

6 – EDITORIAL: After two petrochemical fires, how much risk is too much for Texans in an oil boom?, Dallas Morning News, 3/24/19

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2019/03/23/after-two-petrochemical-fires-much-risk-much-texans-oil-boom>

Two fires at refinery and chemical facilities on the Texas Gulf Coast this month remind us that as the Texas energy industry grows, so does the risk.

7 – Arkansas governor calls for postponing hog-farm bill, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 3/25/19

<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/mar/26/governor-calls-for-postponing-hog-farm-/>

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson said Monday that he hopes state lawmakers don't proceed with a bill that would change how concentrated animal feeding operations, namely hog farms, would be permitted.

8 - Groups: EPA has dragged heels on oil dispersant rules, WWLTV, 3/25/19

<https://www.wwltv.com/article/tech/science/environment/groups-epa-has-dragged-heels-on-oil-dispersant-rules/289-6e7016e3-c6c5-4f51-9c3e-d55a8c2fc8d9>

The groups say dispersants such as Corexit, used during the Exxon Valdez and BP oil spills, were more toxic to people and the environment than oil alone.

9 – Coal plants emitted more than ever in 2018, putting Earth in ‘deep trouble’, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 3/25/19

<https://www.nola.com/environment/2019/03/coal-plants-emitted-more-than-ever-in-2018-putting-earth-in-deep-trouble.html>

Global energy experts released grim findings Monday, saying that not only are planet-warming carbon-dioxide emissions still increasing, but the world's growing thirst for energy has led to higher emissions from coal-fired power plants than ever before.

10 – Water laps at St. Francisville homes; too soon to say if town will need 'another ark', Baton Rouge Advocate, 3/25/19

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_1e495656-4f48-11e9-bec8-97c6e03e1f46.html

The waters of the Mississippi River, at nearly their peak level, are slowly lapping at Fred Smith's St. Francisville home. While it's a spectacular sight, it's not unusual for the West Feliciana Parish town to see the water this high. What is unusual is that it's been this way for a month.

11 – EPA provides update on Bonita Peak Superfund site water treatment plant and sampling data, Global Mining Review, 3/25/19

<https://www.globalminingreview.com/exploration-development/26032019/epa-provides-update-on-bonita-peak-superfund-site-water-treatment-plant-and-sampling-data/>

Yesterday, EPA released preliminary water quality sampling data related to the temporary shutdown of the interim water treatment plant at the Bonita Peak Mining District Superfund site at Gladstone (Colorado).

12 – EPA to Issue Partial Waivers on 39 Refinery Exemptions for 2018, WNAX, 3/25/19

<https://wnax.com/news/180081-epa-to-issue-partial-waivers-on-39-refinery-exemptions-for-2018/>

The Environmental Protection Agency will reportedly issue partial waivers to some of the 39 refiners asking for exemptions from the Renewable Fuels Standard. The agency has also told Texas Senator Ted Cruz the agency they will keep granting waivers and won't retroactively reallocate those waived obligations.

Cleanup Continues At Deer Park Facility, Crews Laying Foam On Exposed Chemicals To Prevent Emissions

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo will instruct county departments to look for ways to improve future response to incidents of this kind.

ALVARO 'AL' ORTIZ | MARCH 25, 2019, 12:21 PM (LAST UPDATED: MARCH 25, 2019, 5:39 PM)



Texas Commission on Environmental Quality mobile units are used to monitor air quality near the Houston Ship Channel Saturday, March 23, 2019, in Houston. The efforts to clean up the Intercontinental Terminals Company petrochemical facility are ongoing and a portion of the channel remains closed.

The cleanup process continues at the Deer Park petrochemical storage facility that sustained a massive fire last week. Officials said Monday the latest air quality readings are satisfactory and water is being tested, while traffic on part of the Houston Ship Channel is still restricted.

Representatives from Intercontinental Terminals Company (ITC), which owns the facility, gave an update of the situation on Monday morning. ITC executive Brent Weber said two tanks that still contain chemicals are being cleaned up. Another five tanks are empty and a sixth one isn't dangerous because it only contains

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Adam Adams, with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), said there haven't been detections of dangerous chemicals through air monitoring in last 24 hours. "The results have been consistent: No detections from any of those responses in any of those monitoring efforts that warranted an alert notification to the unified command," he said.

Besides the EPA, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), Harris County and ITC are also monitoring air quality. The EPA is also testing water quality.

About 60,000 gallons of oil product had been recovered from the water by Sunday, according to the Coast Guard.

On Sunday, a statement from Harris County Public Health said there continues to be a low health risk to the general public.

This section of the TCEQ's website has updated information.

Ship Channel

Traffic on the Houston Ship Channel is restricted as the cleanup process goes on. U.S. Coast Guard Captain Kevin Oditt said that a tank ship successfully transited on Sunday through the impacted area to assess the impact and ensure there's no visible oil.

A tank ship and a tank barge are scheduled to transit inbound and outbound on Monday. "They'll be visually inspected," Oditt said, "and if there's any oil visible on the haul, they'll be sent to a decontamination facility."

The Coast Guard partially opened the section of San Jacinto River that connects with the ship channel on Sunday and Oditt said "overflights did not find any pollutants or any oil in the water."

Two-way tow and barge traffic was opened on Monday on the river, but traffic on the Ship Channel will continue be restricted as the cleanup process is ongoing.

Schools are also getting back to normal and the Deer Park and Galena Park school districts, as well as other districts in the impacted area, resumed classes on Monday.

The TCEQ announced Friday it's suing ITC for violations of the Texas Clean Air Act, and four La Porte residents have also filed litigation against the company. ITC spokeswoman Alice Richardson said the company has received 1,600 "claim inquiries" as of Friday. The company now has a [website](#) focused on the response efforts.

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Hidalgo said she will direct the county's pollution control and public health specialists "to identify additional capacity, including equipment and personnel" to improve the future response to incidents of this kind.

Hidalgo said she will also task a company specialized in industrial safety to conduct a risk assessment "and determine what other chemical plants might pose a risk."

Asked about air and water quality, Hidalgo said the monitoring continues and, after coordination with the impacted municipalities, the conclusion is that there are no concerns about water quality at this moment. However, independent water sample tests performed by the Galveston Bay Foundation found a high level of benzene in at least one sample taken from the Houston Ship Channel on Saturday.

The Harris County Fire Marshal's Office has given ITC a subpoena and a preservation order to prevent the destruction of any evidence.

the chemical fire. But some residents aren't so sure

By Kaylee Hartung, Angela Barajas and Keith Allen, CNN

🕒 Updated 1:30 PM ET, Mon March 25, 2019

(CNN) — The Houston Ship Channel remained closed Monday because of oil and pollutants that leaked into the waterway during last week's chemical fire at the Intercontinental Terminals Company in Deer Park, Texas, a Coast Guard official told reporters.

But officials say they are making progress in their efforts to open the waterway, as well as to empty and secure tanks at the ITC facility and to monitor air quality for hazardous material. Deer Park students returned to school Monday.

"I'm very, very optimistic in regards to the progress that's being made," said Deer Park Mayor Jerry Mouton, praising the collaborative cleanup effort. "I stand here today and tell you in assurance that safety to the public is priority number one."

The all-important channel is described by the American Society of Civil Engineers as a manmade port for ocean-going vessels, stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to Houston and Harris County, Texas.

U.S. Coast Guard Captain Kevin Oditt said tests are being done to monitor the conditions of the channel. A tank ship successfully went through the area on Sunday.

"The goal was to assess the impact to the on-scene recovery operations as well as ensure that there was no visible oil on the hull. Both were successful," Oditt said.

A tank ship and tank barge were to be sent through the area on Monday, he said. The Coast Guard has opened the San Jacinto River, he said.

Health risks

The massive fire that burned at ITC for four days last week sent thick black smoke over the Houston suburbs. Then, a containment wall broke Friday, sparking another fire and sending chemical waste into waterways that lead to the ship channel.

Residents of two Texas cities were told to shelter in place as hazardous chemical vapors escaped the foam blanket put in place to extinguish the industrial fire.

"We were held hostage in our own homes," longtime Deer Park resident Steve Michels said. "It's just been horrendous."

Brian Williams lives 10 miles from the ITC facility that first caught fire a week ago. "I have a garden in my backyard. I'm about to take it up," he says. "I'm not going to eat anything out of it anymore."

Last Tuesday, smoke blew over the roof of Williams' home. He started feeling ill by Wednesday and he vomited on Friday. He says he's confident the symptoms he felt "didn't have anything to do with the pollen in the air."

So far, a company spokeswoman said, around 1,600 legal claim inquiries have been made as of Friday.



The fire at the Intercontinental Terminals Company in Deer Park burned for days.

Tests performed by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality over the weekend found nine specific chemicals that "exceed their health-protective concentration level," in water from a ditch at the ITC facility that flows into the channel. But TCEQ says there's no threat to the public drinking water.

The agency also tested the air quality in the area over the weekend, finding low levels of benzene, one of the potentially cancer-causing chemicals they also found in the ditch water. The levels detected weren't high enough to cause health concerns, TCEQ says.

Williams doesn't trust such assurances.

"They say we can't smoke cigarettes, it's bad for your lungs, it's bad for your health," he says. "So when you put heat on any type of chemicals it's not good for you, we know it's not."

"A lot of us can't afford to go to the doctor," Williams explains. "So we have to live with this."

Acute exposure to benzene can cause headaches, dizziness or loss of consciousness, the World Health Organization says. Chronic exposure can lead to cancer.

Michels, who's lived in the area for more than 20 years, felt his eyes burning and had shortness of breath this week. He went to a local clinic for help. He wanted his blood tested specifically for benzene, but his insurance wouldn't cover it. He says he was told it would cost him approximately \$350 out of pocket.

'It is always hard to tell'

Complaints of itchy skin, stuffy and bloody noses, and tightness in the chest have been brought to Dr. Umair Shah's attention in the days since the fire began.

... come to us and they say, 'This is related to something in the exposure.' We are certainly keeping that in mind, but doctors are making that evaluation," he explains. "The question about whether those symptoms were related to the fire, it is always hard to tell."

"Conditions are changing, daily. People are very stressed, and (stress) can exacerbate their symptoms" says Elena Craft, senior director of the Climate and Health Program at the Environmental Defense Fund.

Her nonprofit has been working side by side with federal and local agencies taking both air and water samples.

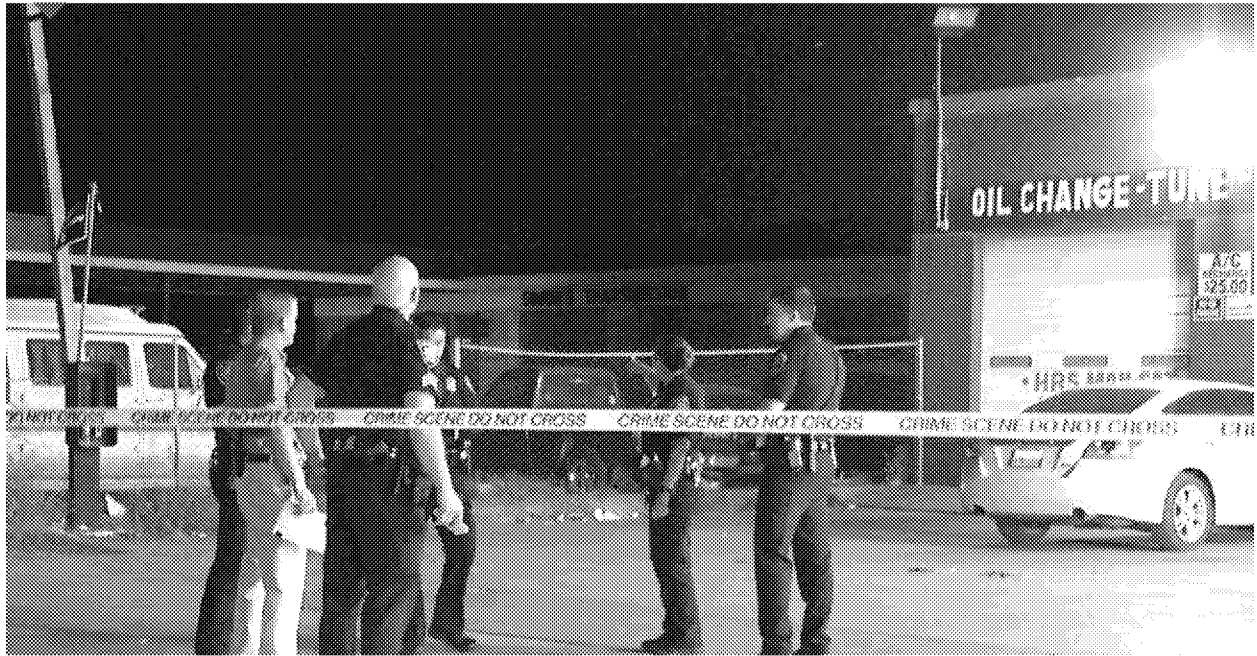
Her biggest concern is the material inside the tanks that has yet to be disposed of. ITC continues to pump chemical waste from the charred tanks and contaminated waterways. The company announced Sunday that significantly less remains in the tanks and in the contaminated drainage ditches.

Meanwhile, as the smoke dissipates, concerns mount for those who call this part of Texas home.

"This kind of incident should've never happened," Craft lamented.

CNN's Joe Sterling, Ed Lavadera and Jason Morris contributed to this report.

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<https://www.mysanantonio.com/news/texas/article/Texas-students-return-to-school-following-13714127.php>

Environmental, economic damage a concern now that fire out

Juan A. Lozano, Associated Press Updated 7:07 pm CDT, Monday, March 25, 2019



IMAGE 1 OF 5

In a Wednesday, March 20, 2019 photo, maritime traffic moves through the Houston Ship Channel past the site of now-extinguished petrochemical tank fire at Intercontinental Terminals Company in Deer Park, Texas.
... more

HOUSTON (AP) — Businesses and residents expressed concern Monday about the environmental and economic fallout from a fire at a Houston-area petrochemical storage farm that sent huge plumes into the air for days and prompted the partial closure of one of the busiest commercial waterways in the U.S.

Officials said it could be several more days before a section of the Houston Ship Channel reopens. Investigators with Harris County, which includes Houston, said they have delivered a subpoena to Intercontinental Terminals Company — the firm that owns the facility — to preserve any evidence regarding the cause of the blaze. Students returned to class after the fire prompted school closures near the facility.

Here's a look at what has happened and what to expect:

Recommended Video



in the suburb of Deer Park, southeast
damaged or destroyed and thrust
plumes of black smoke into the air and burned on and off for days.

It's unclear how the blaze began.

On Thursday, residents were warned to stay inside for their own safety because of high levels of benzene in the air. The chemical evaporates quickly and can cause drowsiness, dizziness, rapid heartbeat, and headaches, with worse symptoms at higher levels of exposure.

Some of ITC's tanks leaked oil products and a containment area was breached Friday, leading to the mixture reaching the ship channel, said company spokesman Brent Weber.

Authorities shut down part of the ship channel Friday to traffic to try and continue the cleanup and contain the spill.

U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Kevin Oditt said Monday it could be several more days before that part of the channel reopens.

"The priorities remain ensuring the safety of our on-scene responders as well as mitigating any impact to the waterway or the environment and reopening the Houston Ship Channel," Oditt said.

The San Jacinto River, a waterway leading into the ship channel and located north of ITC's facility, was reopened to barge and tow traffic but only for about three hours on Monday.

Oditt said officials have performed several test runs with ships, letting them pass through the affected area to see if they don't interfere with the cleanup and don't get

contaminated. Such test runs will help the Coast Guard determine when the channel can be fully opened.

EFFECTS ON COMMERCE

The Port of Houston is the No. 1 in the U.S. in foreign tonnage and is in the top five in the U.S. in the number of containers it handles.

The head of a maritime trade organization representing more than 200 companies at the port said the closure of several miles of the channel has slowed but not stalled commerce. The top products that pass through the ship channel include resins and plastics, chemicals, fabrics, including raw cotton, and steel and metals.

Capt. Bill Diehl, president of the Greater Houston Port Bureau, said Monday the port is a manufacturing center for petrochemicals and supporting businesses and that those places are still operating but that products may be slow to come in or out right now.

Diehl said the channel is 52 miles long and other sections have remained open. As of Monday afternoon, some ships were being slowly taken through the area that had been closed to make sure they didn't disturb the cleanup. That section, for now, is only open to daylight transits, Diehl said.

"It has an effect on business," Diehl said, "but not as much as you'd think."

Diehl said that half of the ships that come into Texas come through the Port of Houston. He said on average they move 55 ships a day.

WHAT'S NEXT?

ITC is facing legal challenges over the fire and spill.

On Monday, seven people who live near the storage facility filed what is believed to be the first civil lawsuit against ITC over the fire. The suit was filed in state district court in Houston.

The residents are asking for at least \$1 million in damages, accusing ITC of negligence. They allege they suffered a variety of illnesses due to the fire and the

release of chemicals into the air, including, bronchitis, pneumonia and itchy, burning eyes.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton filed a lawsuit against ITC on Friday and said the state must hold the company "accountable for the damage it has done to our environment."

State and other environmental watch dogs also are continuing to test water and air.

Water samples from the Houston Ship Channel have been tested, but those results were still not complete Monday, said Jeff Kunze, with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Over the weekend, benzene levels in the air were very high near the site of the fire, but dropped significantly, according to monitoring by the Environmental Defense Fund.

Tests by the nonprofit the Galveston Bay Foundation over a four-day period starting Friday found benzene in 14 water samples taken from the Houston Ship Channel. But only one sample, from Saturday, had levels of benzene considered to be unsafe by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. By Monday, all samples tested were at safe levels, according to the foundation.

Adam Adams, the federal onsite coordinator with the EPA, said Monday that air monitoring from his agency as well as several others in the last 24 hours had not found any hazardous conditions that would require warning the public.

"That's very positive," Adams said.

Associated Press writers Jamie Stengle in Dallas and Tammy Webber in Chicago contributed to this report.

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/juanlozano70>

Houston Ship Channel closure could cost \$1 billion

Jordan D Blum, Houston Chronicle Updated 3:54 pm CDT, Monday, March 25, 2019

The closure of a portion of the Houston Ship Channel in the aftermath of the days-long Deer Park chemical fire could cost the petroleum and petrochemical sectors an estimated \$1 billion in direct and indirect costs and lost revenues, experts said.

Shutting down a major chunk of the Port of Houston for a few days means cutting off access to the biggest port in the nation in terms of foreign tonnage, shipping out petroleum, chemicals, plastics and countless other products in container terminals while receiving large volumes of crude oil and massive container cargo ships.

Recommended Video



A few days of closures typically equates to about \$500 million in direct costs in delayed shipments and lost supply chain materials

ia Burns, director of the University of
Another \$500 million is estimated to be canceled shipments and vessel traffic

worldwide, she said.

"This is a very busy port and a very busy part of the world," Burns said, noting the Port of Houston's importance for the global chemicals, plastics, oil and gas industries.

RELATED: Some vessels now moving through closed waterway caused by ITC spill

The port began slowly moving some ships through Monday after being closed for three days. The vessels are being decontaminated as they move through the roughly seven-mile portion of the Houston Ship Channel near the Lynchburg Ferry, extending from Tucker Bayou, where the severely damaged Intercontinental Terminals Co. facility is located, to Houston Ship Channel light 116.

"The Houston Ship Channel is extremely efficient. It's the miracle of transportation," [X](#)
Dunn said. "When everything works perfectly, no one notices. But when there's a problem

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the petrochemical and petroleum sectors occurring along the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast, she added.

As of Monday morning, the Houston Pilots reported 31 ships waiting to move into or past the affected area, and 31 ships were waiting to depart.

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HEARST

BUSINESS // ENERGY

Deer Park fire underscores why good companies plan for disasters

Jordan Blum

March 25, 2019 | Updated: March 25, 2019 8:51 a.m.



● ●

ITC spokeswoman Alice Richardson reiterated the company's concern for Deer Park residents.

Photo: Nicole Hensley, Houston Chronicle / Staff

As a cloud of toxic darkness hovered above, spokeswoman Alice Richardson was asked if the Intercontinental Terminals Co. would apologize to all of the residents of Deer Park for the petrochemical fire that raged for almost four days, releasing a seemingly endless plume of noxious smoke that would stretch hundreds of miles in the sky.

Of course ITC would apologize to all of them, Richardson said Tuesday as tears welled up in her eyes and her voice cracked. The company is very sorry, she insisted. “This isn’t an event we wanted or planned,” she said. “Many of my employees work in the city of Deer Park. They’re out there fighting this fire the best they can.”

The fire was finally extinguished less than 24 hours later on Wednesday. But, early Thursday morning, an emergency shelter-in-place warning was issued not because of the smoke, but from dangerously high levels of the invisible, cancer-causing crude oil compound benzene that were detected just outside of Houston in Deer Park. As the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality would later note, “Because the fires are no longer burning, vapor from remaining exposed chemicals can escape. The remaining product is being removed, and vapor suppression activities are continuing.”

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Essentially, a day after Deer Park residents thought they could finally take in some — relatively — fresh air, an emergency started all over again without a strong enough warning that this was an ominous possibility.

Emergency planning and response protocols are a critical part of the Houston energy sector, and the key goal is always to avoid multiday environmental and human health disasters. But they do still happen and will continue to occur in the future. Crisis and communications experts warn it is essential for companies to do everything they can to avoid disasters while still planning for the worst. Richardson of ITC did not respond to an interview request.

So much is essential from the “golden hour” after a disaster strikes for the ongoing communication with the wide range of stakeholders, including employees, neighboring residents, investors, governmental officials, the media and more. And countless hours of planning only go as far as they’re effectively put into practice.

“The biggest thing of course is to identify all the weaknesses and prevent a disaster from happening,” said Terry Hemeyer, executive counsel at Pierpont Communications and an adjunct management professor at Rice University. “Most companies have plans. The good companies rehearse and have tabletop exercises with emergency response officials.”

Incidents that occur can include small pipeline leaks, large explosions like the Arkema chemical plant disaster in Crosby after Hurricane Harvey that led to the indictments of the CEO and others, and the 2010 Deepwater Horizon tragedy that left 11 people dead and spewed oil for three months from BP's well in the Gulf of Mexico.

Other fires just in recent days have ranged from Exxon Mobil's sprawling complex in nearby Baytown to Houston-based Phillips 66's Carson refinery in California.

Hemeyer was a group vice president at Pennzoil for years, including when a refinery explosion in 1995 in Pennsylvania killed three people and injured others. He helped lead the communications response from Houston. "We were on top of it quickly," he said, in part because every worker should know whom to call when there's an issue.

"The key is to gain control of it and fix the problems," he said, including putting out the fires, taking care of the employees and the injured, coordinating with local officials, contractors and vendors, and controlling the messaging and communications with the public.

Honesty is always critical, even if that means temporarily delaying the release of some information. "You don't talk before you have the facts. We don't want to say something if it's not true," Hemeyer added.

At Pennzoil, they could pull the vital response teams together within 20 minutes to start working the problems, he said, including logistics teams buying or locating any necessary parts to fix equipment or put out fires. Today, spray foams are quickly deployed to try to put out fires and suppress chemical leaks.

Companies should be prepared to respond at all hours but sometimes they're caught off guard. That shouldn't occur.

"That's usually because it happens at 2 a.m.," Hemeyer said. "I often say crises don't happen from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m."

The planning process should be very inclusive, said Julie Fix, an assistant professor of communication at the University of Houston who heads the Fix & Associates public relations firm.

“You want every Chicken Little in your organization in the planning room saying, ‘The sky is falling,’” she said, so every possibility is considered.

The messaging to everyone who’s impacted is critical. Employees and their families will need to receive much different information, Fix said, than investors and securities analysts who are more concerned about the impacts on the company and the stock performance.

“The secret isn’t magical,” she said. “It’s recognizing the vulnerabilities and how to deliver communications to all the necessary parties.”

While communication used to focus on phone calls and the media, now companies also need to utilize email, websites and social media to get the messages out. Twitter and Facebook, for instance, are just as important as almost as anything else, Fix said.

A lot of energy companies follow the lead of the federal government, adopting a unified incident command system, called ICS, for a standardized approach, which first originated decades ago from wildfires in California and Arizona. The system can be used for everything from active shooter scenarios to hazardous materials accidents that require major evacuations.

The ICS strategy requires a clear chain of command set up well in advance of any disaster with an incident commander in charge and then public information and liaisons officers to lead the communications. There are typically four teams with everyone knowing their responsibilities — an operations response team, planning team, logistics team and an administration team to oversee financial and legal matters.

Oftentimes, the federal, state or local responders will lead the situation with the companies providing support and information.

Energy companies mostly declined comment for this story or only spoke on background. Chevron, for instance, declined an interview request but pointed out its emergency preparedness strategies worldwide that include planning efforts with a vast array of nations.

Chevron uses a tiered approach that goes down to site-specific responses for every facility, and up to a corporate team responsible for providing guidance and expertise in emergency response, crisis management and business continuity. Chevron has expert contractors in all

sorts of areas like wildlife management, oil spill and air-dispersion modeling, toxicology, fire fighting, and shipping and salvage.

And Chevron participates in multiple international oil spill cooperatives with other energy firms.

Companies have to work together for planning and best practices. After all, fairly or not, every incident is essentially a black mark on the entire industry.

jordan.blum@chron.com

twitter.com/jdblum23

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EDITORIALS 2 DAYS AGO

After two petrochemical fires, how much risk is too much for Texans in an oil boom?



Dallas Morning News Editorial

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Two fires at refinery and chemical facilities on the Texas Gulf Coast this month remind us that as the Texas energy industry grows, so does the risk.

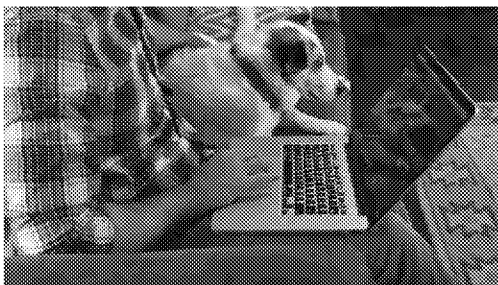
The Exxon Mobil refinery in Baytown caught fire on March 16 and was contained that afternoon by emergency officials with no injuries, The Houston Chronicle reported.. The fire in the gasoline unit generated a cloud of dark smoke.

place advisory, which entails going indoors immediately and closing all sources of outside air, including air conditioners or heaters.

ADVERTISING

Nobody wants to live this way, and we urge regulators to investigate the causes of these fires and ways to prevent such dangers. Attorney General Ken Paxton filed suit against ITC late Friday to force compliance with clean air laws, and we hope he is successful. But we may find that the fires were accidents. And the history of the petrochemical industry tells us that accidents, fires and explosions sometimes come with the territory.

As the Texas petrochemical industry continues rapid expansion, bringing investment and coveted blue collar jobs, we must consider how much risk we are willing to live with.



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The Future of Working Remotely Is Here: What You Need to Know

By *Lifesize*

[The Robert Kraft plea offer reminds us that the 'demand side' of sex trafficking must be held accountable](#)

Risk is not a bad thing. Humans only make progress by taking risks. And oh, the progress human:

computers cheap enough for most of us to carry around in our pockets; we have medical devices that extend our lives.

But misunderstanding risk can lead to bad decisions. We all know that riding in a car is a dangerous thing to do, yet most of us are irrationally more afraid of cockroaches and mice than the fast lane of Interstate 635.

Likewise, we struggle to connect the mundane task of fueling up our cars to the risk of fire at the refinery that made the gasoline, hundreds of miles away. And we struggle to connect the thrill of a Texas economic boom to those Texans stuck in their homes in Deer Park until the smoke from the chemical fire dissipates.

The goal must always be zero accidents. The reality of achieving that is impossible to assure. So, as Texans, we have to measure our ability to tolerate risk. How many accidents are we willing to live with to support an industry that is key not only to the Texas economy, but also modern life on earth? We don't know the answer to this question. Are Texans willing to occasionally shelter in place if no one gets hurt? Is the occasional refinery fire at an otherwise safe facility acceptable? Or is that too great a price, if we don't know the long-term impact on children in the neighborhood?

Here is where Texans should have serious, thoughtful discussions with each other, with their elected officials, and with regulators at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and, of course, the Railroad Commission, which regulates the oil and gas industry.

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The people standing up to lead this discussion about petrochemical risk tend to be environmental activists, which is useful, but not enough. We need a much broader group of

~~people leading these difficult conversations, in particular those we elected to spend their time~~

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Governor calls for postponing hog-farm bill

Federal agency is looking at measure, Hutchinson says

by Emily Walkenhorst | Today at 3:20 a.m. | Updated March 25, 2019 at 6:59 p.m.

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C&H Hog Farms, seen from the air in May 2017, is home to thousands of hogs on Big Creek in the Buffalo River watershed. - Photo by Mitchell PE Masilun

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson said Monday that he hopes state lawmakers don't proceed with a bill that would change how concentrated animal feeding operations, namely hog farms, would be permitted.

Given that he expects a state agency realignment soon and a recent letter from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notifying the state of a review of the bill, Hutchinson said he wants lawmakers to "postpone" their efforts.

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"Right in the middle of a transformation is not the time to be making dramatic rule changes for large-scale animal feeding operations," he said.

The governor's comments came on the same afternoon that the bill's sponsor in the Arkansas House, Rep. Mary Bentley, R-Perryville, filed another amendment to the legislation. Bentley's amendment would make its provisions, if adopted into state law, null and void in the event federal regulators disapprove of it. The amendment also seeks to maintain existing permitting regulations.

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The amendment will run Wednesday morning before the bill is considered. That will be at 10 a.m. in the House Agriculture, Forestry and Economic Development Committee meeting.

"I wish the governor had waited just a little bit longer," said Sen. Gary Stubblefield, R-Branch, the bill's Senate sponsor.

[RELATED: Complete Democrat-Gazette coverage of the Arkansas Legislature]

Stubblefield said the bill is designed to make it so hog farmers only have to go to one agency when they seek a permit. He also said the response to his bill has blown it out of proportion.

Senate Bill 550 seeks to change the agency ultimately responsible for issuing permits to farms that have liquid animal manure systems -- typically hog farms -- from the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality to the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission.

The commission would decide whether to permit farms' liquid waste management systems and would issue permits approved by local conservation districts for liquid waste disposal. The commission also could overturn the disapproval of a disposal permit or a disapproval of part of one.

Currently, the commission reviews liquid waste disposal plans, formally called "nutrient management plans," and determines whether they meet the commission's standards. The plans are then submitted as part of farms' operating permit applications to the Department of Environmental Quality.

Stubblefield and the Arkansas Farm Bureau, which pushed for the legislation, say almost nothing else would change as a result of the bill. Opponents argue that what Stubblefield and the Farm Bureau say the bill does isn't actually written into the bill, which makes those assurances less encouraging.

Stubblefield said Monday that he would support an amendment to his bill that specifically kept current regulations regarding liquid animal manure systems and moved them over to the Natural Resources Commission. He said he has never filed such an amendment because he didn't think it was necessary.

Bentley filed an amendment later in the afternoon that states regulations must "at a minimum, maintain the current standards and requirements of Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission Regulation No. 5 Liquid Animal Waste Systems."

The Pollution Control and Ecology Commission is the Department of Environmental Quality's regulatory and appellate body. The department follows regulations adopted by the Pollution Control and Ecology Commission.

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Stubblefield and the Farm Bureau said they would want the regulations to remain intact, and Natural Resources Commission Executive Director Bruce Holland said his agency would recommend adopting the same regulations. That would need to be approved by the commission's board, lawmakers and Hutchinson.

Bentley said Monday evening she wanted to look over the amendment further before commenting on it but said she and others have tried to look into everyone's concerns regarding the bill.

Bentley's amendment also includes language addressing a letter sent last week from the EPA to state environmental regulators that said the federal agency was reviewing the law to make sure it complies with Clean Water Act requirements. EPA Region 6 Administrator Anne Idsal wrote to Department of Environmental Quality Director Becky Keogh that the bill "merits further evaluation to determine its effect" on federal rules and enforcement.

Hutchinson cited the EPA revoking the state's permitting authority in 2013 as an example of the state previously clashing with the agency. The agency reinstated the state's permitting authority after lawmakers overturned Act 954 of 2013, which changed how water flows were calculated.

"I'd also add that this is not the administration of President Obama. This is the administration of President Trump," Hutchinson said. "President Trump's EPA is who sent that letter, so I think the prudent course is let's keep it as it is."

Bentley's amendment reads: "If Region 6 of the United States Environmental Protection Agency determines that the final rules promulgated by the commission to implement this act either supersede or otherwise adversely impact the delegated authority of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality to administer the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit program ... the rules and this act, after all legal remedies have been unsuccessful by the Attorney General, will be considered void, and the authority to administer "no discharge permits" associated with the generation, storage, handling, and land application of liquid animal litter will revert back to the department."

Conservation groups also are concerned about any impact the bill might have on public transparency and have cited differences in how the commission is set up versus how the department is set up, as well as a law that appears to exempt from public disclosure certain records at the commission but not at the department.

Many have argued the bill would allow applicants to waive the "notification period requirements" surrounding their permit applications, which they said could mean applicants can waive the public notification period.

Representatives with the Arkansas Farm Bureau said "notification period requirements" refers to the requirements that regulators issue permitting decisions within a certain time frame. Current law says applicants can waive the "timeliness requirement," but that language was stripped and replaced with "notification period requirements," Farm Bureau officials say, because the Bureau of Legislative Research recommended it.

Those statements have not stopped conservation groups concerned that "notification period requirements" could be interpreted in a different way, stripping public notice from the permitting process.

Bentley's amendment, which must be approved by the House committee, would change the language back to "timeliness."

Hutchinson said Monday that he had received more than 200 communications opposing the bill. He said he hadn't been approached by anyone who had expressed concerns for public transparency.

But opponents of the bill say that a current state law, Arkansas Code Annotated 15-20-1006, may mean that if the legislation is adopted into state law, farms' nutrient management plans may no longer be available to public inspection.

The law states: "Any records collected by the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission in furtherance of this subchapter that contain information about a specific nutrient management plan or specific nutrient application shall not be made public record."

Hutchinson said he would have to look over that carefully but that such a law "perhaps" reaffirms his opposition to Senate Bill 550.

The law is not included in the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act state code, which outlines the records that are exempt from public inspection. The act states in its definition of "public records" that "all records maintained in public office or by public employees within the scope of their employment shall be presumed to be public records." The law then lists 23 exemptions, which must be changed by legislation.

The law removing nutrient management plan information was passed in 2003, as Act 1059, to amend state natural resources and economic development statutes. The subchapter amended concerns the certification of people who review nutrient management plans.

One conservation group contacted by the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* said the law has been used to deny public records requests for information in nutrient management plans, and forwarded a copy of a public records request rejection by the commission in 2013 for information related to C&H Hog Farms.

Stubblefield said Monday that he thinks nutrient management plans should be available for public inspection at the commission if they are available at the department.

"I think this ought to be available to the public, no question," Stubblefield said. "That's only right."

Gordon Watkins, president of the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance founded in opposition to C&H's operation within the river's watershed, said he thought that perhaps applications for nutrient management plan certification may be available under the law, but approved ones would not be.

Richard Mays, an environmental attorney who has represented the alliance, said the law's existence provides an argument against the plans' release.

Mays said the 2003 bill likely didn't attract much attention at the time and that exempting records from public disclosure by passing laws outside of the Freedom of Information Act statute was a "sneaky way to do it."

"It just shows you how some people who draft these statutes who pass them are not concerned about the public's right to know what is going on," Mays said.

Since the bill's filing, conservation groups, utilities and former state environmental regulators have issued statements opposing the bill.

On Friday, nine former Pollution Control and Ecology Commission members released a statement, citing the potential for unintended consequences, among other concerns.

The Beaver Water District and Central Arkansas Water have expressed concern for the potential for weaker regulations to expose drinking water sources to excess algae-causing phosphorus.

A spokesman for Entergy Arkansas said Monday in an email that the utility also opposes the bill. As written, the email said, the bill "proposes to alter the permitting and regulation of hog farms in a way that appears inconsistent with the provisions of the federal Clean Water Act and will potentially result in the EPA taking control of Clean Water Act regulations that are currently handled locally by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality."

The utility has several wastewater permits issued by the department through its state-delegated authority from the EPA.

Other concerns raised about the bill include a less accessible complaint process before the commission; a lack of a third-party rule-making process at the commission; a history of pollution related to excess poultry waste in the Illinois River watershed; and fear that C&H Hog Farms could apply for another permit from the commission and remain open in spite of an order to close by the Department of Environmental Quality.

Supporters of the bill have said C&H, which is located near the Buffalo National River, must continue its current permit application, which they say would remain under the department's purview until litigation regarding it is resolved.

A Section on 03/26/2019

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Groups: EPA has dragged heels on oil dispersant rules

Janet McConnaughey, Associated Press Updated 4:36 pm CDT, Monday, March 25, 2019

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Environmental groups and women from Alaska and Louisiana say the Environmental Protection Agency has dragged its heels on issuing rules for oil spill dispersants, and they're ready to sue to demand them.

They say dispersants such as Corexit, used during the Exxon Valdez and BP oil spills, were more toxic to people and the environment than oil alone but, nearly four years after taking public comments about such rules, the agency hasn't acted.

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elephone interview. With the Trump sale in Alaska's Beaufort Sea, she said,

The EPA said it is reviewing a letter sent Monday to Administrator Andrew Wheeler, saying the people and groups will sue unless the agency acts within 60 days.

The letter is a legally required step before filing suit under the Clean Water Act. This lawsuit would be filed in Washington, said Jack Siddoway, a third-year law student in the University of California-Berkeley Environmental Law Clinic.

The clinic is representing Ahtuanguaruak (ah-TOON-gah-rook), who lives in the Inupiat village of Nuiqsut (noo-IK-sut); Kindra Arnesen of Buras (BYOO-ruhs), Louisiana; Alaska Community Action on Toxics; Cook Inletkeeper, also from Alaska; and Earth Island Institute's ALERT project, which is based in Berkeley.

Arnesen said the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon spill off Louisiana severely damaged her family's commercial fishing business. Before the spill, she said, at times there were

"acres and acres" of baitfish and rafts of larger fish. "After the spill those disappeared. It was like going through a water desert," she said.

She also blames it for her family's migraines, respiratory problems and rashes so deep they caused open wounds and left scars. She said their son seems to have recovered completely, but her husband still has major problems and she and her daughter are still living with lower levels of illness.

She said dispersants break up oil so it's not easily seen. "To my mind, it's used to create a situation where it's out of sight, out of mind, but not out of the way," she said.

The EPA's oil spill response guidelines haven't been updated since 1994 to reflect research on dispersant effects after the Exxon Valdez broke open on rocks in Prince William Sound in 1989 and BP's Gulf of Mexico spill, according to the notice of intent to sue.

"Given the history of offshore oil drilling, it is simply a matter of when — not if — a devastating oil spill will occur," the letter states.

The public comment period on dispersants ended April 22, 2015, Siddoway said in a telephone interview.

He said he had made a freedom of information request about what EPA has done since April 2015 to further the rulemaking.

"That has been delayed due to the government shutdown, and we're still waiting for a response," he said.

He said revision of oil spill guidelines is listed as a long-term action on "the unified agenda, a semi-yearly kind of laundry list that EPA's working on." But that's nothing new, he said: "It's been there in various forms since 2001, even before the rulemaking was put into play."

The current EPA rules let companies "essentially do whatever they want when it comes to dispersant," Siddoway said.

If the agency sets rules continuing that policy, he said, the rules themselves can be challenged.

"Right now we can't make a challenge to substance ... because the rule is still pending," he said.

—

Associated Press reporter Dan Joling contributed from Anchorage, Alaska.

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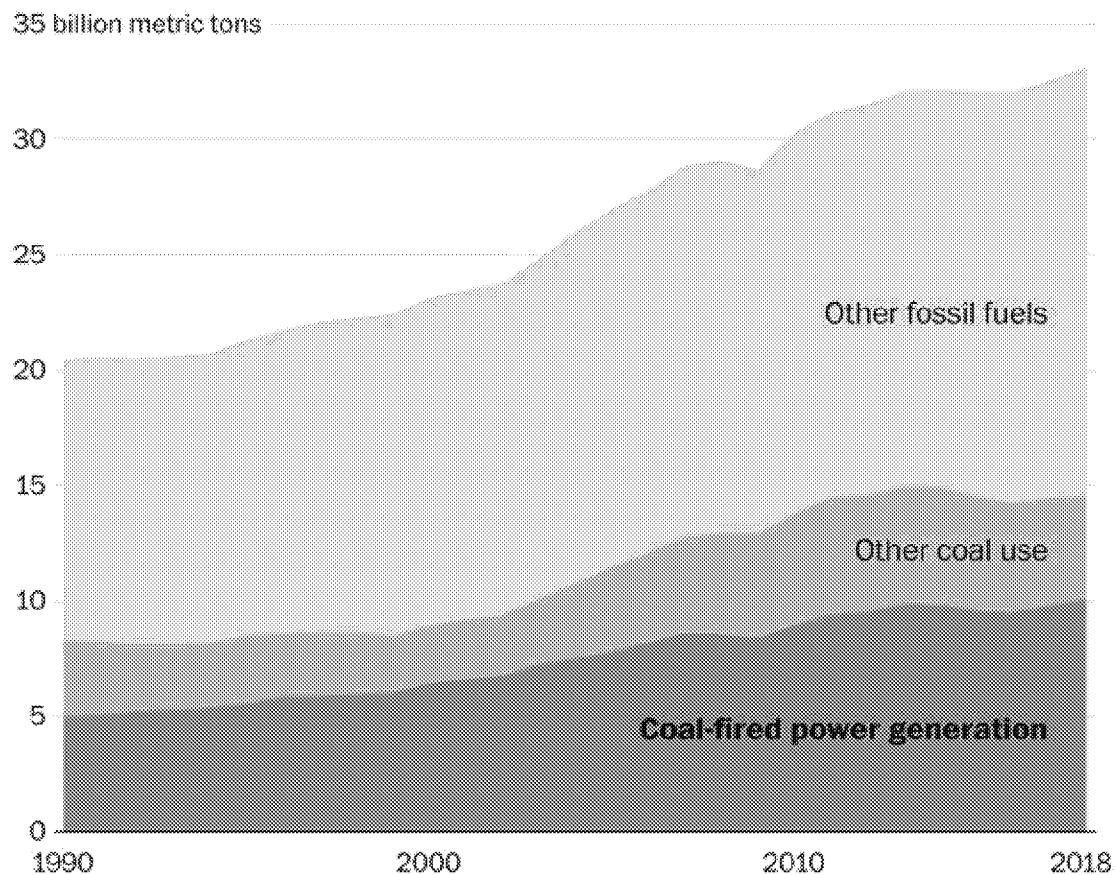
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Coal plants emitted more than ever in 2018, putting Earth in 'deep trouble'

Updated 10:54 PM;
Today 10:53 PM

World energy-related CO₂ emissions hit record high

In 2018 emissions grew at the fastest rate since 2013. Emissions from coal-fired power plants contributed the largest share of this growth.



Source: International Energy Agency

JOHN MUYSKENS/THE WASHINGTON POST

Coal plants emitted more than ever in 2018, putting Earth in 'deep trouble.'

1

Global energy experts released grim findings Monday, saying that not only are planet-warming carbon-dioxide emissions still increasing, but the world's growing thirst for energy has led to higher emissions from coal-fired power plants than ever before.

Energy demand around the world grew by 2.3 percent over the past year, marking the most rapid increase in a decade, according to the report from the International Energy Agency. To meet that demand, largely fueled by a booming economy, countries turned to an array of sources, including renewables.

But nothing filled the void quite like fossil fuels, which went toward nearly 70 percent of the skyrocketing electricity demand, according to the agency, which analyzes energy trends on behalf of 30 member countries, including the United States.

In particular, a fleet of relatively new coal plants located in Asia, with decades to go on their lifetimes, led the way toward a record for emissions from coal-fired power plants - exceeding 10 billion tons of carbon dioxide "for the first time," the agency said. In Asia, "average plants are only 12 years old, decades younger than their average economic lifetime of around 40 years," the agency found.

As a result, greenhouse-gas emissions from the use of energy - by far their largest source - surged in 2018, reaching an record high of 33.1 billion tons. Emissions showed 1.7 percent growth, well-above the average since 2010. The growth in global emissions in 2018 alone was "equivalent to the total emissions from international aviation," the body found.

including the United States and China - are nevertheless still turning to fossil fuels to satisfy ever-growing energy demand.

"Very worrisome" is how Michael Mehling, deputy director of the Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, described Monday's findings.

"To me, all this reflects the fact that climate policies around the globe, despite some limited pockets of progress, remain woefully inadequate," he said in an email. "They're not even robust enough to offset the increased emissions from economic expansion, especially in the developing world, let alone to spur decarbonization at levels commensurate with the temperature stabilization goals we've committed to under the Paris Agreement."

Mehling questioned whether the Paris climate agreement - the 2015 global accord in which countries vowed to slash their carbon emissions - has the capacity to compel nations to live up to their promises and ramp up climate action over time.

"This will require overcoming the persistent barriers that have prevented greater progress in the past," Mehling said.

Overcoming those barriers is complicated, as the agency report makes clear.

China, for instance, satisfied a demand for more energy last year with some new generation from renewables. But it relied far more on natural gas, coal and oil. In India, about half of all new demand was similarly met by coal-fired power plants.

In the United States, by contrast, coal is declining - but most of the increase in demand for energy in this country was fueled by the burning of natural gas, rather than renewable energy. Natural gas emits less carbon dioxide than coal does when it is burned, but it's still a fossil fuel and still causes significant emissions.

There's some slight good news in the new report: As renewables and natural gas have grown, coal has a smaller share of the energy use.

Yet the fact that it's still growing strongly contradicts what scientists have said about what's needed to curb global warming. In a major report last year the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that global emissions would have to be cut nearly in half by 2030 to preserve a chance of holding the planet's warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

That would require extremely fast annual reductions in emissions - but instead, the world is marking record highs.

And when it comes to coal use, that same report found that to limit temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius, it would have to decline by as much as 78 percent in just over 10 years.

Rob Jackson, a professor of Earth system science at Stanford University, said the substantial growth of wind and solar energy detailed in Monday's report was overshadowed by the world's ongoing reliance on fossil fuels.

"The growth in fossils is still greater than all the increases in renewables," Jackson said, adding that few countries are living up to the pledges they made as part of the Paris climate accord. "What's discouraging is that emissions in the U.S. and Europe are going up, too. Someone has to decrease their emissions significantly for us to have any hope of meeting the Paris commitments."

The new results dash earlier hopes that global emissions might be flattening and starting to decline. From 2014 through 2016, they fell slightly, and coal emissions dipped. But with a renewal of growth in 2017 and record highs in 2018, turning the corner on emissions remains nowhere in sight.

As a result, optimism from earlier this decade has largely faded. International efforts to combat climate change have struggled to maintain momentum, and the U.S. government has undergone a reversal of priorities.

"We are in deep trouble," Jackson said of Monday's findings. "The climate consequences are catastrophic. I don't use any word like that very often. But we are headed for disaster, and nobody seems to be able to slow things down."

Authors Information:

Chris Mooney covers climate change, energy, and the environment. He has reported from the 2015 Paris climate negotiations, the Northwest Passage, and the Greenland ice sheet, among other locations, and has written four books about science, politics and climate change.

Brady Dennis is a national reporter for The Washington Post, focusing on the environment and public health issues. He previously spent years covering the nation's economy. Dennis was a finalist for the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for a series of explanatory stories about the global financial crisis.

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Water laps at St. Francisville homes; too soon to say if town will need 'another ark'

BY EMMA KENNEDY | EKENNEDY@THEADVOCATE.COM MAR 25, 2019 - 4:51 PM



A vehicle stops at the edge of the water encroaching on the road as flooding continues in the old ferry landing road and Bayou Sara area Monday March 25, 2019, of St. Francisville, La.

ADVOCATE STAFF PHOTO BY BILL FEIG

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ST. FRANCISVILLE — The waters of the Mississippi River, at nearly their peak level, are slowly lapping at Fred Smith's St. Francisville home.

While it's a spectacular sight, it's not unusual for the West Feliciana Parish town to see the water this high. What is unusual is that it's been this way for a month.

As of Monday afternoon, the river at St. Francisville stood at 51.67 feet, just below its 2011 record crest of 53.48 feet, according to National Weather Service data.



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When will the swollen Mississippi River slowly fall in Baton Rouge?

Local officials aren't concerned yet with the water impacting day-to-day operations in the town. They say there are adequate alternate routes, residents are accustomed to the inconvenience each spring, and there are fewer than a half-dozen occupied houses in the floodway, anyway.

But, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been in flood-fighting mode since October — starting much earlier than usual March — and with the probability of northern snow melt still to come, traveling into an already-high Louisiana waterway, there could be trouble.

“Traditionally you get a pretty good rise in June from all the snow melt, so I hope this is out of here before then because if the water gets in the streets of St. Francisville, Noah would need another ark,” St. Francisville Mayor Billy D'Aquilla said. It's rare to see floodwater in the more residential areas of town.

As it stands now, following Ferdinand Street west from the town's main street is visually jarring, as bright orange barricades announce the thoroughfare's closure before the road sweeps down a hill to become a plain of water.

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Stilted houses and street signs rise up from the swollen river, and a telephone pole's hand-painted base shows passersby that the water is still a ways off from reaching its historic high.

Army Corps spokesman Ricky Boyett said the river is still operating within its capacity and studies are showing the flooding has reached its crest, which means those water levels will start slowly receding, but there are still unknown factors this flood season.

“They’re expecting to reach a record length of time for being above flood stage. For our processes, we’re at the capacity of what the system is designed to do,” he said. “It’s kind of a

matter, to us, of maintaining inspections and processes so if something does occur that would threaten that system we can intervene.”

West Feliciana public works director Gabe Marchand said Ferdinand Street has been closed to traffic about three weeks, cutting off access to approximately four houses that are either abandoned or used as weekend homes, and a large portion of the roads surrounding Bayou Sara.

He said in a regular spring season the waterway will rise and fall with a total road closure accumulating to about a month, but this year has been worse.

In addition, D'Aquilla said, the town has an oxidation pond near the impacted area that has seen some inundation, but he said the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality is continuing to test the water levels — which so far have been deemed safe.



Street signs show where the intersection lies under the flood waters and cormorants dry out their wings in a shallow area as flooding continues in the old ferry landing road and Bayou Sara area Monday March 25, 2019, in St. Francisville, La.

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ADVOCATE STAFF PHOTO BY BILL FEIG

Smith's home was one of roughly a dozen that were raised in 2011 due to flooding concerns, made possible through a grant awarded to the town. He has a truck and a boat parked out front, and though the water is only feet from his front porch, he's not concerned with the inconveniences of a swollen Mississippi.

"It's not too unusual, 50 years ago it'd be every 10 years with a flood like this and now it's about every two, but if you live here that's just part of the deal," he said Monday.

Just up the hill at the Shade Tree Bed and Breakfast, KW Kennon's business overlooks the rising water. Being on higher ground, he doesn't experience any negative impacts directly but said the influx of motorcycle riders wanting to take Louisiana's backroads in the spring will steer away from West Feliciana, and waterway recreationalists like kayakers will need to find alternate plans.


Even still, he carries the local attitude of making do.

"This is going to be a long-term flood, the longest term in my memory," he said Monday. "It comes up every few years but seldom does it stay up as high as it's been and will be this year. But, it'll eventually go down and we'll be back to normal."

The Mississippi River is at or above flood stage for much of its length through Louisiana, though levees protect communities to a higher elevation. Federal hydrologists have not set a flood stage for the river at St. Francisville but do note its 53.48 foot mark in 2011 as the area's record flood.

EPA provides update on Bonita Peak Superfund site water treatment plant and sampling data

Published by Claire Cuddihy (/team/claire-cuddihy/), Assistant Editor

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Global Mining Review (<https://www.globalminingreview.com>), Tuesday, 26 March 2019
10:45

Yesterday, EPA released preliminary water quality sampling data related to the temporary shutdown of the interim water treatment plant at the Bonita Peak Mining District Superfund site at Gladstone (Colorado). EPA's analysis confirms that there were no adverse impacts to downstream drinking water or agricultural users associated with the short-term shutdown of the plant based on data that indicate minimal to no changes in water quality at sampling points downstream of Silverton in Durango. There were no observed impacts to aquatic life. Any impacts to aquatic life would be limited to the Animas River near Silverton.

The water treatment plant went offline on the evening of 14 March due to extreme weather conditions resulting in a power surge that tripped critical circuit breakers at the facility. The same weather event triggered an avalanche and several snow slides across the county road and prevented access to the plant. After a period of less than 48 hours, EPA brought plant back online and resumed normal operations on the afternoon of 16 March.

"EPA appreciates the efforts of our partners in San Juan County Colorado and the water plant operators for working quickly to minimise the length of time the facility was out of operation and limit any localised impacts to water quality," said EPA Regional Administrator Doug Benevento.

"During and after the treatment plant shutdown, real time measurements of turbidity, pH and electrical conductivity from sondes in the Animas River provided no indication that downstream water users would be adversely impacted," said New Mexico Environment Department Chief Scientist Dennis McQuillan.

"EPA's laboratory test results confirm the interpretation of real time sonde data."

EPA collected water samples at four locations along the Animas River from Cement Creek to Durango from 15 - 21 March. A preliminary analysis of the sampling data from 15 - 20 March shows a measurable elevation of metals concentrations, particularly copper, at the confluence of Cement Creek and the Animas River, about six miles below Gladstone. Levels of metals were slightly elevated at a location on the Animas River approximately one mile south of Silverton.

Heavy metal concentrations in the Animas River at two sampling locations in Durango were well within the range of concentrations previously observed when the treatment plant is operating. The detections of low concentrations of metals in the Animas River may be

associated with the temporary closure of the plant, but they may also be related to several other factors that should be considered when evaluating these data.

These include snow and avalanche debris being deposited in Cement Creek, the Animas River and local waterways which potentially introduced metals containing soils and sediments. There is also the potential for the ongoing rain and runoff at lower elevations to mobilise metals containing sediments from the 416 fire at locations below the confluence of Hermosa Creek and the Animas River.

Preliminary data can be viewed at <https://response.epa.gov/GladstoneWTP> (<https://response.epa.gov/GladstoneWTP>). Data from samples collected on 21 March will be available on this website later this week.

Read the article online at: <https://www.globalminingreview.com/exploration-development/26032019/epa-provides-update-on-bonita-peak-superfund-site-water-treatment-plant-and-sampling-data/>



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NEWS

EPA to Issue Partial Waivers on 39 Refinery Exemptions for 2018

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PHOTO: WNAX

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The Environmental Protection Agency will reportedly issue partial waivers to some of the 39 refiners asking for exemptions from the Renewable Fuels Standard. The agency has also told Texas Senator Ted Cruz the agency they will keep granting waivers and won't retroactively reallocate those waived obligations. American Coalition for Ethanol Board member and Houghton, South Dakota grower Troy Knecht says that's disappointing and has caused a lot of ethanol demand destruction.

He says the ethanol demand loss couldn't come at a worse time. Knecht says they'll keep fighting for the renewable fuels industry and pushing the EPA and Congress.

Knecht says it's disheartening that the issue has become so political. He's hoping they can get more support from President Trump to correct the waiver problem.

The EPA is poised to issue partial waivers by the end of March, a move only made once by the agency in the past.

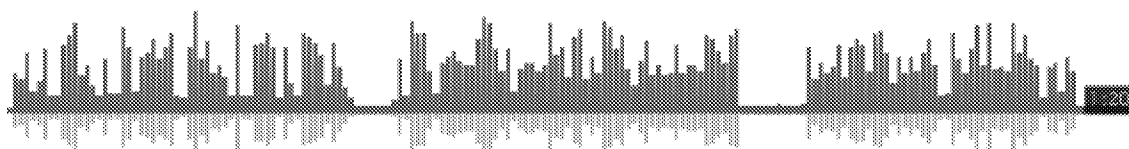


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By Tom Wright

The Lens

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has asked Mosaic Fertilizer to resume removing wastewater from its reservoir atop its Gypsum Stack No. 4 in St. James Parish, despite the company reaching its objective of lowering that water below an elevation of 180 feet. But Mosaic told The Lens that the company has not decided to do so – even as the EPA cast doubt on the company’s model used to determine the stability of the reservoir itself.

Mosaic, the EPA and Louisiana’s Department of Environmental Quality have been in emergency mode since Jan. 10, when the company first alerted the agencies to a bulge in some farmland neighboring the northern slope of the 200-ft-tall gypsum stack, which at the time held roughly 750 million gallons of highly acidic wastewater left over from production processes at the plant. It indicated shifting in the layers of soil beneath the stack and raised the possibility that the northern wall of the gypsum dam could breach.

The company had been removing much of that water from the top of Stack No. 4, with the aim of lowering the water level's elevation, easing the weight of the water stored and reducing the chance that a wall breach could pour much of the wastewater into nearby waterways, including the Blind River.

In a Mar. 15 letter to Mosaic, Cheryl Seager, EPA Region 6's director of compliance assurance and enforcement, noted that the company had worked to reduce the water levels to a level of 180 feet. Based on a stability evaluation performed by a third party, the engineering firm Ardaman & Associates, the company said that level would be adequate to stabilize the stack.

Ardaman believes, based on its modeling, that "a breach at or below the 180-foot elevation will not result in a release of process water outside the stack," the letter stated.

As of Mosaic's daily situation report on Tuesday, the latest available in LDEQ records, the level of the water atop Stack No. 4 was 179.9 feet, and a little over 402 million gallons in volume.

But Seager wrote that EPA and LDEQ remain concerned about the stability of Stack No. 4.

"Although stack movement has slowed over the past few weeks, it still continues at a rate such that movement expected in one year (1/2) is observed in just 2 or 3 days," she said. "Extrapolation from the current data suggests that movement may not stop for another 100 days."

Seager went on to say that such a rate of underground movement means the stack "remains in a slow failure mode," even with the water at a 180-foot level.

"Because the stability model does not appear to be correctly predicting stack stability," Seager wrote, "and we still have not physically identified the location where the failure surface encounters the surface" – an apparent reference to the point underground where the clay layers are shifting – "there remains the possibility that the failure surface starting point is farther south than predicted," she wrote. "For these reasons, EPA, with the concurrence of LDEQ, is asking that Mosaic continue to decant water from Stack 4 until the elevation is below 179 feet. We will evaluate the data again when the elevation reaches that level or below."

It doesn't appear that Mosaic is immediately agreeing to that request.

"We are in constructive discussions with the agencies about possible further water transfers," wrote Callie Neshund, Mosaic's director of public and governmental affairs, in a Thursday statement to The Lens. "No decision has been made yet, and those discussions continue."

Throughout the crisis at Stack No. 4, Mosaic has shifted millions of gallons to other ponds at its plant site in Convent. It has at least five such ponds of assorted sizes now, including the new "East Cell" pond, which has a capacity of about 483 million gallons and was completed in early March.

Mosaic began transferring water from the pond atop Stack No. 4 to the East Cell on March 7, but suspended the transfer on last Friday, the same day that EPA dated its letter requesting that the transfer operation be resumed, according to the daily situation report.

The EPA referenced its view that the "stack remains in a slow failure mode, implying a safety factor below unity." Ardaman's modelling suggests, with the Stack No. 4 water level at a 180-ft. elevation, that the safety factor is at 1.10.

Such safety factors in the engineering sense represent calculations of the forces that a dam such as the gypsum wall can sustain, according to Dr. John Christian, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

“You take the strength, if you will, of the dam and divide it by what the loads are that you expect to have to carry,” he told The Lens. “And if that number is greater than 1, that indicates that you think the available resistance is larger than the force that it’s going to have to carry.”

A safety factor below unity is less than 1.0. “Obviously, you don’t want to get there,” Christian said. “Getting down to 1.0 clearly indicates that you’re in trouble.”

Concern about a potential dam breach has focused on the potential environmental impact on Blind River, which biologists and other scientists have warned could kill a wide range of animals and vegetation as the river drains into Lake Maurepas in the Lake Pontchartrain Basin. The water itself has a pH factor between 2 and 3, which is a dangerous level of acidity to put into an environment that has not evolved to handle it.

Mosaic’s worst-case scenario assumed that any breach would likely occur toward the top of the northern wall, about 185 feet above grade. Their modeling assumed that up to 159 million gallons might escape over a seven-day period, but that such a volume would be held on site by berms and blocked culverts along two nearby highways, LA 3214 and LA 3125.

The above article originally appeared in The Lens on its website (www.thelensnola.org). The Louisiana Weekly enjoys a partnership with The Lens.

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Tests show presence of benzene in Houston Ship Channel

The levels are still well below what the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality surface water quality standard is for fish and shellfish, but one sample results were above the EPA's recommendations.

HARRIS COUNTY, Texas — Galveston Bay Foundation on Monday released results from its multi-day water monitoring samples that indicate the presence of benzene in the Houston Ship Channel.

The organization collected 14 samples over four days starting Friday, both upstream and downstream from the ITC fire. The samples showed less than one part per billion benzene in the water except for one that showed 46.8 parts per billion, according to the foundation.



First lawsuit filed by Harris County family against ITC



The levels are still well below what the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality surface water quality standard is for fish and shellfish, which is 581 parts per billion. However, the EPA recommends a national water quality standard of 16 parts per billion.

By Monday, all sample levels were back down to less than one part per billion, according to Galveston Foundation.

The foundation will continue to take water samples in the coming weeks.

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